DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 241 001 IR 020 071

AUTHOR	Gaffney, Maureen, Ed.
TITLE	Examining Television.
PUB DATE	80
NOTE	17p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Media Center for Children, Inc., 3 West 29th Street, New York, NY 10001 (write for price; quantity discounts available).
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)
JOURNAL CIT	Young Viewers Magazine; v3 n3-4 Fall 1980
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Early Childhood Education; Elementary Education; *Incidental Learning; Individual Development; *Learning Experience; Nonschool Educational Programs; *Observational Learning; Social Problems; Television Research; *Television Viewing
IDENTIFIERS	Australia; Informal Education; *Media Appraisal; PF Project

ABSTRACT

Designed for media specialists and educators, this issue contains four articles focusing on children and television. The lead article outlines major Australian views on television, analyzing how these concepts determine that country's use of the medium. The second article reviews international developments in children's television highlighted at the 1979 Books and Broadcasting for Children international seminar. Research into children's perceptions and evaluations of television dramas is documented in the third article. The survey focuses on children's views of situation comedies, reruns, and prime time shows rather than children's programs. This issue closes with excerpts from a book which assesses many movies frequently seen on television. (LP)

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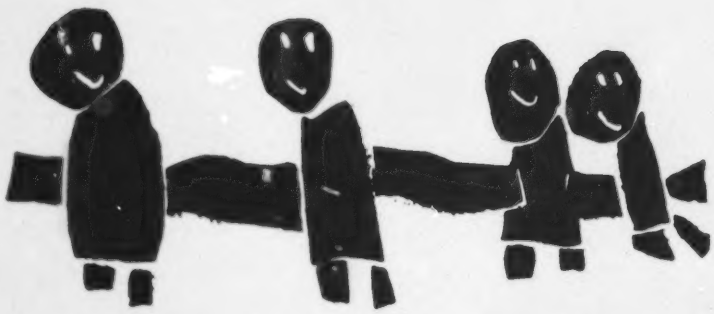

young viewers

Fall 1980

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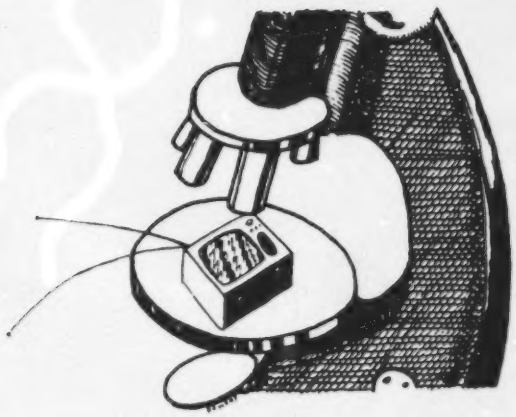

examining television

Television (and film which is guilty "by association") has run into a great deal of criticism. It has been indicted for causing outbreaks of anti-social behavior in children, for inducing passivity, and for shortening children's attention spans. It has even been blamed for lowering the national reading level. We cannot explore all these criticisms at once; however, in this issue of Young Viewers and in the one which follows, our contributors take a good hard look at some of the facts and some of the beliefs that dominate contemporary thinking about children and media. Australian television producer Allan Kendall discusses different national views of what television is and analyzes how those concepts determine that nation's use of the medium. Librarian Martha Barnes describes her impression of international developments in children's television which she received while participating in an international seminar called "Books and Broadcasting for Children." Hope Lunin Klapper, Associate Professor of Sociology at New York University, documents research she conducted in which children were asked to explain their perceptions and evaluations of television dramas -- not children's programs, but the situation comedies, reruns, and prime time shows school age children typically watch. This issue closes with excerpts from an insightful new book, The Screen Image of Youth, by Ruth M. Goldstein and Edith Zornow; while the screen they refer to is the movie screen, their book also has application to television since many of the movies they comment on appear regularly on television.

Part two of Allan Kendall's article will appear in the next issue of Young Viewers along with a provocative article on pre-school television by Grant Noble, author of the acclaimed book on children and television, Children in Front of the Small Screen.

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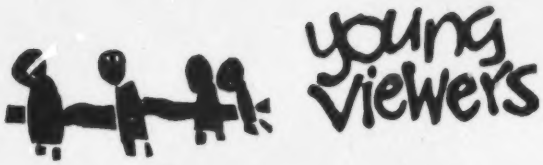

Fall 1980 (Vol 3, Nos 3 & 4)

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by Ruth M. Goldstein and Edith Zornow. Ms. Goldstein is an educator and former film chairperson of the New York City Association of Teachers of English; she is also a 16mm feature film reviewer for Film News. Ms. Zornow is film producer for "Sesame Street" for the Children's Television Workshop and producer of the Emmy-winning "The Art of Film" (National Educational Television). Goldstein and Zornow also collaborated on another book, Movies for Kids, which has been expanded and reissued by Frederick Ungar Publishing Company (New York, 1980).

Illustrations on the cover and pages 3, 4, 7, 9 and 14 are by Zagreus L. Bowery.

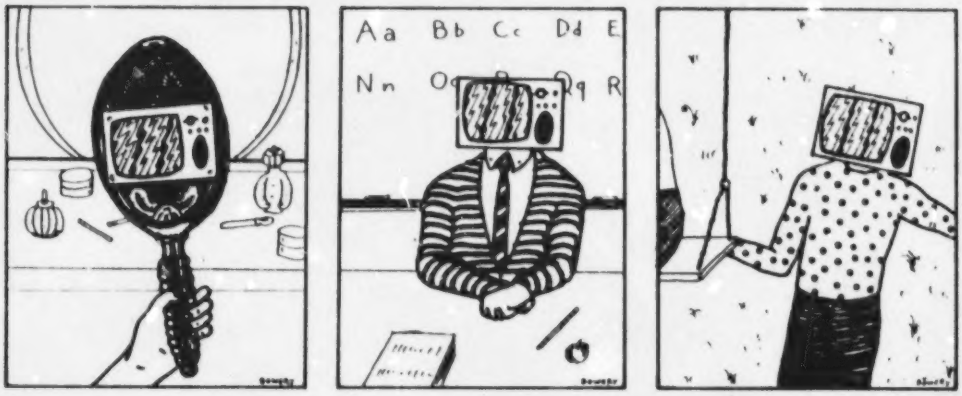
Editor: Maureen Gaffney

Managing Editors: Gina Michaels, Jane Rayleigh

Assistant Editor: Merrill Lee Fuchs

Errata: On pages 2 and 4 of Volume 3, Number 2 (Summer 1980 Issue), the correct title of Bonnie Levinson's article is, "Playing with Film (Part Two): Inventive Children's Programs at the Delaware Art Museum." On page 16, column one, in Michael Siporin's interview, the name of the pioneering French filmmaker should read Melies (not Meliere).

the many faces of tv



television's impact on young children (part one)

by allan kendall

I should explain, by way of introduction, that I am not a research expert in the field of television's impact on the developing child. I speak as a practicing producer [of an Australian pre-school program "Play School"] who has had opportunities to study production in many parts of the world and to at least discuss much of the relevant research with leading researchers in Europe and North America. Not that studying research is an easy matter for amateurs. The professional jargon can be a great communication barrier and one is often left wondering if researchers always ask the right questions. However, I have made of it what I can, and I'll refer to it whenever I think it's appropriate.

Cross-Cultural Differences

From my various trips around the world looking at television in different countries, one thing that has come home to me is a sense of the profound differences that exist from culture to culture vis-à-vis the assumptions made about the nature of television, the nature of the audience, and the relationship between them.

In some cultures the medium is seen as something like an all-powerful molder of helpless victims. In others it is seen more as a reflector of reality which active and independent viewers can be trusted to process in their own way. In others again, television is seen as an experience which neither persuades nor reflects but which can, perhaps, provide a little innocent "escape" or diversion.

Speaking generally, this last set of assumptions is the one which pertained throughout most of Europe until the emergence of a clear trend to realism in recent years.[1] When I attended the 1970 Prix Jeunesse (the prestigious Festival of Children's Television, held bi-annually in Munich) most Eurpoean programs were of that purely diversionary and escapist ilk. Pleasant fantasy. Never-Never Land. Puppets, cartoons, pretty pictures and fairy stories. The literary tradition of the illustrated book of fairy stories seemed dominant and one detected a sense of regret that television lacked the imaginative quality of literature. There was a nagging fear that the medium was rather passive but no real conviction that it could figure as a major influence in the lives of children. The possibility that large daily doses of fantasy could have a negative impact on children (the inhibition of the development of perceptions of reality, for example) seems to have been a late thought in Europe. These days, however, if one is to judge from the programs shown at the 1978 Prix, the swing to life-oriented material is quite pronounced. Significantly, the swing is more in the direction of reflecting life than of pushing messages in a persuasive way.

What was true of much of Europe, however, has never been true of the Scandinavian countries where there is a strong tradition of using television to reflect life. Far from imposing messages on their audiences, the Scandinavians almost bend over backwards not to persuade. They believe in hanging out their dirty laundry on the line, showing adults as human beings with failings and faults. Many of their programs are quite adult, as though it would be condescending to children not to include heavy social issues and every last realistic detail.

In Sweden, the children's program material covers a range from the clinical details of the birth of a baby to the social and personal dilemma of having a father who is a criminal. In Denmark, similarly, realism is the order of the day. One gets the impression that it is almost compulsory to have at least one visit to the toilet per program. And they can move into very "difficult" areas. One program I saw showed a tired mother bashing away at father in anger over a minor irritation. Another showed an authoritarian father hitting his son when his authority was questioned. And another showed ambivalent parents who were very sweet and gooey until their son showed a hint of independence. Instantly they became bitter and abusive and the result was an all-out brawl.

Clearly the assumption behind this sort of television is that the content is not going to be modelled. Scandianvians don't assume that children imitate passively and they don't assume that television is necessarily a persuader. They see it, rather, as a revealer of truth--truth about which the viewer is expected to make his/her own decisions. The question some of their programs beg is just how much truth a young child can accept. The same question might be asked in Hong Kong where a regular children's program is based on a reenactment of the crime of the week and many four-year-olds are enrolled in the program's crime-catcher's club!

British program content is more carefully geared to the child's level of development. But, generally speaking, the British believe in telling as much truth as they think the child is ready for. They certainly do not assume a passive audience, and many children's programs are based on the principle of active participation.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the assumption that television, intrinsically, is an instrument of persuasion is hardly questioned. To a degree not found elsewhere, advertising is the lifeblood of the American industry. Television is expected to modify the behavior of customers and the notion that content has a persuasive function seems deeply ingrained. In such a setting, the idea of including problematic or negative content in programs for children would be quite unacceptable. Because of the tacit assumption that children will imitate what they see on television, reform of the industry's approach to children's programming is conceived largely as getting rid of undesirable content and of substituting prosocial content. In either case, content is seen as the god whose role is to persuade and the question begged is how much truth is television not permitted to tell.

The existence of these marked differences in intention and tone of television programs in different cultural settings suggests that, if we are to understand the potential impact of television on children, we must research the possibility that differing approaches might have differing impacts. In terms of children's development, some approaches might prove to be more appropriate than others.

Are the British and the Scandinavians, for example, wiser in assuming that the child plays an active role in the relationship with television, and that this interaction may be the most potent and valuable aspect of the experience? Or are the Americans right in their widely-held assumption that television is essentially a one-way medium so that the best one can hope for is to attract the child's attention while worthwhile content is being modelled?

These questions are crucial in the quest for a worthwhile role for television in children's lives. Unfortunately, research coverage of the various possibilities is remarkably lopsided. There is a mountain of research on the tabula rasa hypothesis that television content molds children (especially in relation to violence and advertising), and comparatively little on the counter hypothesis that children perceive television in their own individually unique ways, less on the ways the medium itself modifies those perceptions and thus exerts an influence, and almost none on the actual process of interaction. Until this imbalance is redressed, there is much we do not know about the impact of television on the developing child.

How to best present things on television for young children is surely as important to know as what to present. But that is the area which the mountain of research on the effects of television content largely neglects.

"are the americans right in their widely-held assumption that television is essentially a one-way medium...?"

Impact: A Function of Content--Imitation Theory

No one questions that the effect of television content is part of the total picture. One of the ways children learn is by imitation and, as any parent will testify, children will sometimes directly imitate what they see on television. Children who have imitated Batman or Superman, by attempting to jump out of windows just like their heroes, are tragic reminders of that. In Melbourne recently, a child directly imitated the behavior of a girl in a commercial who runs out in front of cars in the street. At the last instant in the animated spot, a panther springs from nowhere to protect her. After seeing this, the child promptly ran out into the street, apparently confident that the panther would save her from the cars. She did it three times in half an hour. Her mother was hysterical when she phoned the station.

Imitation of violent content is also a possibility. This is the most researched area of all, and despite the fact that the findings are contradictory and sometimes ambivalent, it is important to be aware of the consensus view: That violent content can encourage violent behavior in some children some of the time. Or, in relation to advertising, that television commercials can in some measure influence children's behavior, i.e., affect their attitudes and beliefs.

For me, the real issue is what are we not discovering about the total impact of television because of this emphasis on the possibility that content molds children?

Impact: A Function of Child's Perception of Content?

Aimee Dorr, of the University of Southern California, is one of the few researchers in America who questions the limitations of content research.[2] While acknowledging its contribution, she suggests that, on present evidence, the influence of television content on the development of children has been over-estimated. It is time, she says, to expand research horizons and look at the ways children perceive what is shown. What do they understand or misunderstand? Producers may intend one thing and young children understand another. Content research offers no help there.

Impact: A Function of Media Features and Treatment?

Aletha Houston-Stein and John Wright of Kansas University likewise question researchers' preoccupation with the effects of content alone.[3] They are currently researching the influence of factors such as the pace at which things happen, the degree of action within a shot (any action), variations in sound, and variations in image (shot, angle). They call these "formal features" of the medium--features which are independent of content. Interim results suggest that the impact of formal features is significant. For example, the sheer pace of a happening, be it of a violent nature or not, may well incite an aggressive response in some children.

Gavriel Saloman of Stanford University is also looking at the impact of media treatment of content.[4] He suggests that televison techniques serve as visual analogs of mental processes. The zoom, for example, can stimulate the ability to focus attention and thus encourage cognitive development.

Impact: A Function of Passive Mode of Television Experience?

Perhaps the most dramatic questioning of content research comes from Marie Winn. In her book, The Plug-In Drug,[5] she says, in effect, researchers are missing the point. Winn strongly suggests they stop being obsessed with the content of programs and look to the nature of the medium itself. She holds that children's development is dependent upon their interaction with things and people in real life, and since they cannot interact with television, it is stunting their development and breeding a race of zombies. She regards reformers who campaign for improved content as dangerous because they imply television would be all right if it were cleaned up. The danger lies not in the imitation of undesirable content but in the deadness of the experience. For Winn, "Sesame Street" is no better or worse than Bugs Bunny for all its worthy content.

This view is often voiced (though perhaps less strongly) by developmentalists, and reflects the principles of child development as put forward by Jean Piaget, one of the leading figures in the field. In the Piagetian view of child development, imitation has a place but it is not seen as fundamental. Piaget says, "The observed behavior of others, including those of the teachers, are not formative of new organizations in the child."[6] To develop new organizations, which represent progress through the stages of the child's development, the child must interact directly with the environment. S/he must have an active and total sensory involvement with the physical objects around him/her and active relationships with other people. It is this interactive sensory experience which is fundamental to the child's development, not mere imitation of behavior observed from a distance.

In focusing attention on the nature of the experience provided by television, Winn notes that the only other people to do so were Marshall McLuhan and his "apocalyptic school of followers." (I wonder at her choice of words.) McLuhan did not think television was a passive experience at all; he saw it as a very active and participational one.

Impact: A Function of Active Mode of Television Experience?

In seeking to understand the nature of media and the ways they affect us, McLuhan looked, not to the manifest content, but to the means by which media transmit that content. Basically, those means are sensory. Each medium gives us access to sensory information from which we extract meaning in ways which involve us directly to a greater or lesser degree. The extent of involvement depends on the extent of sensory information (e.g., aural, visual) which we can interpret for ourselves. Hot media (print) provide little sensory evidence. Cool media (television) provide a great deal and, in this view, are the most participational. It is a question of how much has to be accepted on [a journalist's] authority and how much has not.

Reading about an event in a newspaper involves no direct sensory experience; it involves interpreting an abstract interpretation. Listening to a live [radio] broadcast involves directly experiencing the actual sounds, but listeners have no other sense experience, except at second hand, through the reports of a commentator, perhaps. Watching and listening to an event in a film version --edited, condensed--must result in some distortion of the original experience. Because of that, its credibility is ultimately in question.

McLuhan sees live telecasts as a phenomenal revolution in the development of media, one which does much to explain why it is the most popular and influential of the mass media.

"since most american programs ... [push messages], it is not surprising that so much of the research in america has been devoted to the investigation of that persuasion on viewers–what television content does–and so little to the possibility that the viewer may interact with it."

The transmission and instantaneous reception of the actual sights and sounds of an event eliminates the possibility of manipulation or editing. Viewers see and hear what is happening, as it happens, and can interpret that sensory evidence for themselves. The credibility of the experience is beyond question. They are virtually participating in the event itself, experiencing the boring bits along with the exciting. Although the camera can still show one bit of a scene rather than another, nothing can alter the fact that the things shown are actually happening in that sequence at that time.

In McLuhan's terms, then, the unique quality and the unique impact of the telecast is a function of its close approximation to the immediacy, spontaneity, and credibility of life itself. And it is this have-your-own-experience quality that makes live television uniquely active and participational and distinguishes it from the other media which involve the mental decoding of symbols representing the experience of others.

Of course, not all television is live telecast, but McLuhan argues that, even in contrived programs, the medium has most impact when it retains those life-like qualities. Conversely, it has least impact when contrivance kills the life, when manipulation (to push a message) removes us from the spontaneous and the credible. It is all a matter of degree, the difference, perhaps, between a "Z-Cars" [a BBC police drama dealing with human relationships rather than sensational plots] and "The Streets of San Francisco," between a Pinter play and a message-laden symbolist piece.

According to McLuhan, the instinct to use the television medium aptly is more likely to occur in certain cultures than in others. Those with a strong, enduring oral culture (England, for example) take to television like ducks to water. In such cultures, the immediacy of personal contact, of total sensory contact, remains the primary means of experiencing the world, and the fullness of the television experience is congenial. In cultures where the impersonal and abstract medium of print has superseded oral traditions as the primary source of information (as in France) or where the country is too young to have developed oral traditions, television is not congenial. The strength of the "literate" mind is its ability to abstract, to symbolize, and to put in sequence to create meaning. In "literate" countries, programs tend to feature abstract content, to be intentionally persuasive and highly edited to a point of view, be it for dramatic, educational, pro-social, marketing, or entertainment purposes. The medium congenial to the "literate" mind is film, the editor's medium, not television.

Gerald Lesser's report on the difficulties created in "Sesame Street" studio scenes by the spontaneity of children[7] is a perfect example. The point of the scenes was to demonstrate certain content; the children's spontaneity was an embarrassment to the directors, because it fuzzed the message.

McLuhan's theory provides valuable insights into the significance of cross-cultural differences in the use of television, at least as I have observed them. I can imagine a London producer of a telecast of my talk to the National Conference of the Australian Pre-School Association, having confidence in the fact the audience might appreciate the happenings as they occurred, and deciding that, in any case, the viewer has the right to decide whether I'm talking a lot of waffle. I can also imagine that a producer in America would be itching to get his/her hands on the program. (Some background music to pep it up...an ad during the boring bits...Paul Newman to play my part because I'm not photogenic....) My somewhat exaggerated point is that manipulations such as these can turn what is potentially the most truthful, involving, and experiential of all media into an instrument that pushes messages. The greater the push, the more the spontaneity of life is crushed out of the event and the more the viewer is confined to the role of passive observer. Since most American programs are of this ilk, it is not surprising that so much of the research in America has been devoted to the investigation of the effects of that persuasion on viewers--what television content does--and so little to the possibility that the viewer may interact with it.

In such a climate, I don't find it odd that Marie Winn indicts television for permitting so much intake while demanding so little output. But I believe this is a very culture-bound reaction. I also believe that McLuhan, in taking the entirely opposite view, is examining the nature of the medium with greater profundity and from a far wider perspective.

Noble: Interactive Nature of Television

It should come as no surprise, then, that in England, where the assumption of an active relationship between medium and viewer pervades the indigenous programs (not just those for children), a major protagonist for the interactive nature of the medium should emerge.

(continued on page 13)

international developments in children's television

by martha barnes

During six weeks in the fall of 1979, in celebration of the International Year of the Child, representatives from thirty countries who work with and for children in publishing, television, radio, and librarianship, met in the United States to share ideas through the Books and Broadcasting for Children Symposium, jointly sponsored by public television station WPBT of Miami, FL, the Association for Library Services to Children (a division of the American Library Association), and the United States' International Communication Agency. As one of the three United States participants (representing the Association of Library Services to Children), I found this exchange both fascinating and frustrating. Through snatches of meal-time and in-flight conversation, and all-too-brief scheduled meetings, participants would just begin to discuss the different approaches to children's media in their countries when it was time to dash off to another program. Since no papers were presented summarizing each person's professional concerns, the glimpses I got of international children's television are fragmentary, but eye-opening.

The thirty countries represented varied in their national media from educational radio broadcasts shared communally in small African villages, to state-run television concentrating on cultural and educational programs in some European nations, to largely commercial entertainment television and radio in industrialized nations. Most of the nations have a mixed pattern of media development; they are trying to evolve a communication style which reflects their individual cultures and concerns. This development is hampered by the flood of foreign products which are cheaper to use and are, at least initially, more appealing because of their sophisticated production values.

American Television Abroad

I didn't have preconceived ideas about television in other countries. I was basically concerned about the effects of American television on American children, so I was surprised to learn of its prevalence in other countries and its impact on the world's children. A symposium colleague reported that American TV is so popular in Romania that his countrymen are naming their children Kojak. And in Venezuela (where Virginia Betancourt of the National Library is carefully fostering a national publishing industry of books reflecting the Venezuelan point of view, where a child may never hold a book in his/her hands, and where libraries are social and public affairs centers because of the lack of printed materials), children stay up until 2:00 A.M. watching dubbed American sit-coms and detective shows. Many other participants echoed the need for more emphasis on domestically produced materials, and for cooperation and the exchange of resources between professionals working with different media.

A common concern among participants was the low priority and small share of total resources that children's media, including children's television, receives. In Chile, it is not unusual for a weekly children's program to be produced on an annual budget of $3,000, using one camera, with a producer who also researches, writes, and directs. Programs may be taped in advance, but the tape is quickly reused because a videocassette for each program is too expensive. It's frustrating for a creative producer to have such limited facilities and to compete for an audience against slickly produced foreign programs, including cartoons.

This situation is due, in part, to limited station budgets and an ever-increasing audience demand. Even though they are often available only as a package deal, resulting in the purchase of bad as well as good programs, it is cheaper for developing countries to buy foreign materials than to produce new ones.

Participants expressed the need for support and resources to provide a wide variety of children's media, that both respects the child's intelligence and takes children's developmental stages into consideration.

Hopeful Developments in Australia

Although there was not much optimism expressed for the fulfillment of these desires in general, Neil Smith, a children's television producer from Australia, reported in depth on an interesting and hopeful development in Australian children's television.

Since July 1979, due to pressure from parent groups and educational organizations, commercial television stations in Australia must telecast three hours a week (soon to be five hours), between 4:00 and 5:00 P.M., of materials classified as especially suitable for children six to twelve years old. This was initiated by the Children's Program Committee of the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, the government regulatory body of the broadcast media. The new regulations call for television networks and individual stations to submit programs for classification by the Committee; the programs are then measured against a set of guidelines which set out the breadth of possibilities of television for children. The regulations state that programs need not be "didactic, instructional and overtly educational; . . . quality children's programs must first be entertaining television. . . . Children's programs should fulfill some special need of childhood. . . . As quality children's literature contributes to the social, emotional and intellectual development of children, so also should quality television contribute to development in these areas."

The stage has apparently been set for the television industry, producers, educators, parents, critics, and advertisers to come together in the cause of better programs for children. The results, however, as reported by Smith, are not entirely encouraging. Regulation for change requires cooperation; in this instance, there have been many reluctant parties.

On the positive side, children now have an hour each weekday afternoon set aside especially for them. They are seeing a wide range of programs not previously available -- drama, documentary, wildlife programs -- and, after an initial period of adjustment from standard fare, they like them. TV stations which have chosen to cooperate have initiated new schedules, new formats, and a smattering of new Australian programs. Plans are in hand for even more development, especially in television drama for children.

However, the lobby group for the industry, the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations, has vehemently opposed the principle of regulating for change: "For the first time in the history of broadcasting in Australia, a Government agency has assumed full control of part of the broadcast day, dictating to viewers what they should see." Encouraged by this opposition from their industry advocates, some stations have largely ignored the guidelines, or met them with the least effort. Some have done almost nothing to change the parade of cartoons and situation comedy reruns.

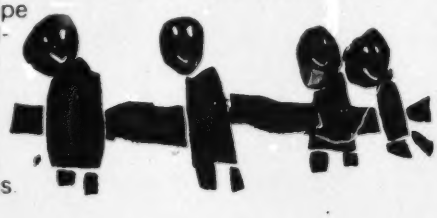
Smith feels that regulations, which can be skirted and avoided, will not do much good, and that the only prospect for change is his hope that Australian television will realize from this experience that children are an important audience who must be served, even at the expense of some profit.

The developing situation in international children's television should be of prime concern to all children's advocates, especially those in the United States. For the time being, at least, our television shows and programming policies affect the world's children as well as our own.

What to Do When the Lights Go On

By Maureen Gaffney
and Gerry Bond Laybourne

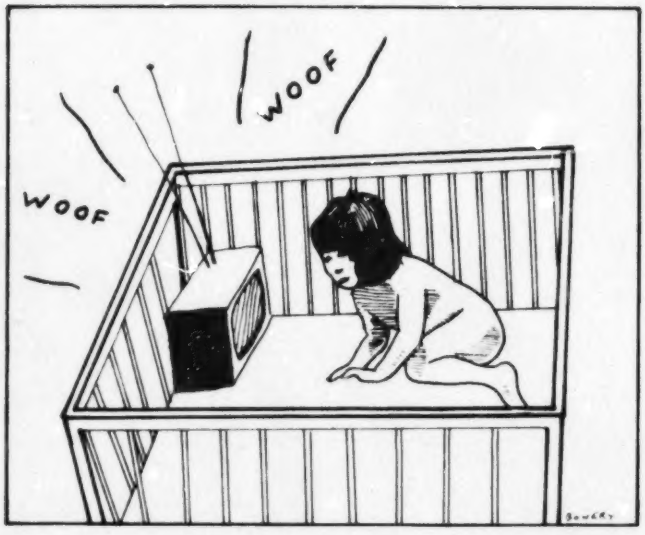
What to Do When the Lights Go On is an absolutely unique resource. It is a recipe book for people who want to combine art activities and film with children. It gives film users practical, child-tested information about what children perceive in films and what activities can be used to follow a film screening. The book includes a recipe section—art activities to do with children after certain films are shown; a film index which includes over 300 films with annotations; extensive subject and activity indexes; and is heavily illustrated with photographs from the films and of the art activities.



The Oryx Press
2214 N Central at Encanto Phoenix AZ 85004

ISBN 0-912700-69-6
Paperbound 1980 $12.50
ISBN 0-912700-65-3
Clothbound 1980 $18.50

television barks, child bites



children's perceptions and moral evaluations of television dramas

by hope lunin klapper, new york university

Very broadly, the subject of the research reported here is television and children. The more specific objectives derive from some thinking about existing research on this topic and what seem to be some serious blind spots or oversights.

There are three major fields of inquiry which seem clearly relevant to an understanding of the relationship between children and television. The first is developmental psychology. The second focuses on the nature of children's perceptions of the media. And the third is the study of the effects of the media on children. Unfortunately there seems to be very little cross-fertilization between these three fields; and the field which studies the effects of the media on children rarely uses the findings of the other two. Thus, a review article of the state of knowledge about the media and children lists, at the end, twenty-nine articles, papers, or books as references; no single citation is from the literature of developmental psychology or studies which bear on children's perceptions of the media. Nor are these literatures referred to in the course of the article.[1]

Indeed, existing literature on effects, and speculation by non-researchers on the subject, seems largely based on two assumptions--generally implicit rather than explicit--which these literatures contravene. The first assumption is that the content of the media, as that content is perceived by the researcher or layperson, is basically similar to that perceived by children. Researchers, of course, are sophisticated. They are aware of the complexities of people and society. They are not only aware of the many mediators of effect, they even study them. Nonetheless, the assumption that, within the variations caused by sex, emotional adjustment, and the like, the basic messages which researchers perceive are similar to those perceived by other adults and by children underlies much of the literature of television's effects. The vital question of whether children, simply because they are children, perceive the content differently than do adults has been all but ignored.

The second assumption, and this is occasionally explicit, is that children uncritically accept what is presented on the television screen, and that, given

the opportunity, children will imitate the behaviors and adopt the values and solutions presented to them by television.

The assumption that children perceive what adults perceive acquires a certain absurdity merely by being made explicit. It is common knowledge that children do not perceive sex, death, work, and various other aspects of life as do adults. Why then should they perceive the content of television as adults do? The assumption that children uncritically accept what is presented to them on the television screen seems to imply that television somehow elicits a unique reaction among children. Parents and teachers are well aware that children do not automatically accept and adopt all models, all suggestions, or all orders. It seems legitimate to doubt that the nature of the child changes radically when confronted with a television screen.

Research Method

The broad objective of my research is the exploration of these questions. More specifically, it hypothesizes that the two assumptions are not valid and that principles of developmental psychology and the psychology of perception will be found to be importantly at work in the relationship between children and the content of the television programs they see.

The data to date derive from a series of studies designed to test the research tools and procedures and also broadly test the hypotheses. Twenty groups of children were interviewed. Each of the groups was composed of from six to nine children. The vast majority of the children were between nine and eleven years old; there were a few eight- and twelve-year-olds. The children were selected wholly on the basis of their age and their availability to the various interviewers. They varied by social class and race, but the majority were white lower-middle or middle-middle class children. They lived in New York City and its suburbs, New Jersey, and Connecticut.

Each group saw a different and complete television program. Most were half hour programs, some were hour programs. All were the standard, commercial, entertainment products to which children are normally exposed.

The viewing conditions varied from quite naturalistic (the child viewed under usual conditions at home), to relatively naturalistic (children watched in groups in each other's homes), to non-usual conditions (group viewing in school, in after-school child care centers, or, in two cases, in the homes of interviewers). Most children viewed in their own homes or in the home of a friend.

In no case did a child watch a film, a simulated program, or a program segment. In no case did a child view alone in a laboratory or school room. Those who watched together represented natural groups (friends or classmates). All of the interviews took place within twenty-four hours of the viewing, and roughly half of the children were interviewed immediately after having seen the program.

Children's Responses to Perceived Content

Children and adults do not necessarily see the same stories, even when they watch the same program. However, children do see something, and they tend to remember a good bit of what they see.

The question is: What do they do with what they see? Specifically, is what they see uncritically incorporated into their pool of possibles--possible values, possible behaviors, possible role definitions, possible solutions to problems? Are these possibles accepted and stored away to be called out and used when appropriate situations arise? Does the child's active contribution to television viewing cease with selective perception? Or are the child's values, role definitions, and norms alive and well and active? In other words, do children evaluate, criticize, and judge what they see on television?

To explore such questions, each child was asked whether anyone on the program did anything that was wrong to do. The programs included family programs, comedies, and children's programs, as well as programs filled with violence and lawlessness. The vast majority of children cited at least one "wrong" act, and many children cited several. The kinds of behaviors and solutions judged wrong or bad by the children varied considerably, but they seem to break down into seven broad categories which include the following:

1) acts which are clearly against the law (killing, stealing, breaking in, kidnapping);

2) acts which are clear violations of our society's moral codes but are not necessarily against the law (lying, bribery, trickery);

3) acts which hurt people physically or psychologically; these may be illegal or immoral, such as knifing or shooting (in which case they of course overlap with previous categories), or they may violate neither legality nor morality, as for example punching, taunting, teasing, insulting, or simply failing to appreciate someone's efforts;

4) acts which violate codes of etiquette or manners (yelling, shouting, being fresh, using something without asking permission, stalking out of a room when angry, [illegible]iting without being invited);

5) acts which are judged to be breaches of trust and confidence or acts which are violations of role obligations;[2]

6) acts which violate an individual's freedom of action, such as entering a person in a television contest without that person's permission (one girl said, "It's wrong...because she might have other plans or she might just decide she didn't want to be on TV."), or forcing people by threats, bribery, physical duress, or trickery to do what they don't want to do;

7) acts which are wrong in the sense that they are non-functional, or, in the children's terms, stupid, rather than those which are wrong in the sense of being illegal, immoral, reprehensible, or impolite (for example, one child said, "Well, I wouldn't pull off the doorknob. [Why is that wrong?] It's one way not to get out. It's stupid.").

Children not only criticized acts and solutions to problems; at times they offered alternative solutions.

> . . . They started a big fight and I don't think they shoulda . . . They just coulda left then and not do anything about it . . . Then they wouldn't have gotten into (the fight). (Boy, 10)

> The white men (were wrong) . . . (they) should have left the Shoshones have more time to move out of their village so then the stampede wouldn't come through . . . he could have given them time because he wouldn't have trouble if he let them move out . . . They would've just let the cattles through. (Boy, 10)

> Chet (was wrong) because he ran away and he would get into more trouble then it is by running away. This way, if he stayed and

"the term *effect* is misleading because it suggests that ... children are sitting victims; television bites them. nothing could be further from the fact."

schramm, lyle, and parker

> . . . called up the police, they would have come and helped him. If I was Chet I would quickly call up the police and told them what was wrong and they would have come over and helped him . . . And Chet also did something that was foolish . . . (lying to his wife). He could've told his wife he was in trouble, he could call the police and they would get him out of trouble and then he would see her. By saying he was at his sister's house he made his wife more worried and scared. (Girl, 10)

These comments suggest that television is not a passive experience for children. They don't simply watch and absorb; they react. And the reaction includes the exercise of their critical faculties.

Moral Development

Preliminary examination of the bases on which children judge these acts, values, and problem solutions to be wrong yields three possible generalizations, the first two of which are closely in accord with research findings in developmental psychology.

First, among children of differing ages, and also among children of the same age and even of the same friendship groups, the nature of the reasons offered varied. Thus, there is considerable variation in stage of moral development. Second, there is variation in the state of moral development within a given child when that child is discussing several different "wrong" behaviors. Thus, a number of children have no difficulty in offering a general principle to explain why stealing or teasing is wrong, but fewer of these same children seem to be able to offer a general principle which explains why lying or bribery is wrong, although they say firmly that these acts are wrong.

The third generalization suggests that some children of ten and eleven are at a level of moral development somewhat more advanced than the developmental literature seems to predict. A surprising number of them have rather well developed principles of morality which they can verbalize, sometimes with ease, sometimes not, principles which they apply to the varying and often exotic content which they see on the television screen.[3]

I cite these generalizations not only for their own sake, but because central to all three is the concept of stages of moral development, a concept presented by Piaget in the early 1930s, a concept which has rarely been applied to the relationship of children and media. The reasons children gave for calling acts on television wrong seem to fall into three stages of moral development; furthermore, they seem to follow the levels of moral development described by Kohlberg.[4]

In the initial stage, the reasons are basically consequence-oriented, that is, the sole or chief reason why an act is wrong is that it will produce undesirable consequences, such as punishment. In neo-Piagetian terminology, this would be the pre-moral stage of moral development. Here are some examples, all of them from nine-year-olds:

> Robbing a bank (is wrong). [Why is it wrong?] Because you could get arrested. If the police think you're wrong, you go to jail. (girl)
>
> It is wrong for her to hide the boy and not tell . . . When you don't tell they find out anyways themselves and then it's harder to tell. (boy)
>
> (It's wrong) to pick up a stake and say I'm gonna kill you. [Why is that wrong?] Why should I kill anyone? I'd just get in trouble for it. (boy)
>
> I don't think I'd try and spring anyone out of jail, even if he was my friend, 'cause I'd probably get caught and be put in jail. (boy)

The focus of these reasons is the immediate consequences of the act--not rules or laws or norms or principles. Children in this stage would no doubt find it reinforcive and salutory for depictions of evil, dishonesty, and unkindness to be punished.

The middle level (second stage) of reasons are well described by Kohlberg's term, "morality of conventional role-conformity."[5] Here children focus on obeying the rules, with little if any questioning of why those particular rules exist. Rules are right, therefore violating them is wrong. The following examples are from nine- and ten-year-olds.

> Trespassing (is wrong). [Why is it wrong?] It's against the law.
>
> Selling tickets (is wrong). My mother wouldn't let me sell tickets for pictures of her friends. [Why not?] I really don't know.
>
> Robbing a bank is wrong. [Why is that wrong?] 'Cause it's against the law.
>
> Mimi--a stowaway (is wrong). Even a grown-up is not supposed to go where she's not supposed to go. She's not supposed to.

Some of the children are seemingly on the brink of a higher level of moral development, of judging something to be wrong because it violates a principle they believe in, rather than because it violates a memorized rule. But the jump is apparently a difficult one, as is made clear in the following remarks from a ten-year-old boy:

> It (stampeding) was wrong . . . 'cause you could kill them. [Why is it wrong to kill them?] I don't know. [Why is it wrong?] . . . Well they wouldn't like it if they stampeded on them. [Why is it wrong to kill people?] 'Cause it's against the law. [Why do you think it's against the law?] Because you lose lives and then there's not enough people left in the world.

In the third stage, some of the reasons clearly correspond to Kohlberg's highest level of moral development, which he terms "morality of self-accepted principles." The reasons in this category are neither possible punishment nor rules nor laws; they are principles of right and wrong. These examples come from ten- and eleven-year-olds (and here I omit most of the non-directive probes):

> The gunslinger shot at the man's feet . . . you shouldn't do something to someone you don't want him to do it to you. (girl, 10)

> He shouldn't have tried to kill Chet because Chet didn't kill his brother. [Would it have been all right if Chet had killed his brother?] No. It's not very nice to kill people because they have just as much right to live as you do. You shouldn't kill anyone no matter what they do. Unless they kill you, but then you can't come back to get them. (girl, 10)

> When they spoke to Gilligan and said they hoped he didn't change and would stay his same stupid self. If it was me, I'd feel pretty bad . . . When you go up to someone and say he's stupid, I don't think he'll feel pretty good . . . because you're insulting him. (It's wrong) if it's not really true . . . to go up to him for no reason at all. [What about if it's true?] Well, as long as the person doesn't feel bad. If the person himself--how can I say it-- . . . It really isn't good to insult somebody anytime. [Why?] As I said before it doesn't make him feel any better. (boy, almost 11)

> I don't think it would be right to tell on my best friend. But if they threatened to kill me . . . well . . I guess not, no. I would owe him something because he was my best friend. (girl, 11)

> The natives, the way they tried to take heads off, it's bad . . . because you're killing a person. It's not good to kill anyone really. . . . I's just--Oh, boy, I know it's wrong. I just don't know how to say it. I guess 'cause that person has a right to live. [All people have a right to live?] Most of them. I think just about everybody. [Who doesn't have a right to live?] Hmm. Well. I was wrong there. Everybody has a right to live. Oh, brother. I just know but I can't think of any reasons . . . I guess it's because he's got one life to live and let him live it. (boy, 11)

Where do the bases for these judgments come from? Are they brought to the viewing situation or are they learned directly from the television screen? Perhaps children do learn some pertinent, specific things from television, as for example that trespassing is a crime, or that teasing can hurt even if it wasn't intended to. But most often their explanations and criticisms seem to be based on ideas and beliefs they bring to the program. Perhaps most crucial to the assertion that children react largely in terms of what they bring to the content are two facts: one, their judgments and criticisms are often based on beliefs not presented in the programs; and two, children criticize not only the villain, but also the heroes and the neutral secondary characters. Two children even criticized Superman for hiding his true identity; "It's like lying," they said.

Conclusions

Let me try to summarize what my initial studies suggest:

1) Children perceive and remember a great deal of the action on television. They also perceive and remember messages, but they do not often perceive the same message as adults do (nor do all adults perceive the same message).

2) Children seem to perceive that crime doesn't pay, that violence and lying and unkindness are "bad." They don't always wholly understand why this is so, they may make exceptions for circumstances, but the general message seems to come in loud and clear. However, predicting what kinds of messages reach children is extremely difficult and I have grave doubt that it will be found susceptible to meaningful codification in the near future.

3) Norms, values, beliefs, and role definitions are not merely external factors which influence children only when sanctions are threatened. All of these, plus memories of past punishments received or seen, in real life or the media, are to varying degrees internalized. These codes and influencers of behavior are not simply part of the external world, they are part of the child. They go with the child to the television set, and they influence the child's reactions to what s/he sees.

4) Children of nine and ten, with years of television and other media experience behind them, clearly have learned and can apply the moral and social judgments taught by society. They have some rather firm and socially acceptable role definitions. And their level of moral development is at least as advanced as would be predicted on the basis of the findings of developmental psychology.

What does all this suggest about the role and influence of television itself in the moral development of the child? While my data are as yet preliminary, they do suggest that the child's moral standards are developed out of the totality of his/her life's experiences. When the medium agrees with the other agencies of socialization--and the mass media, by their nature, usually do--they may function as reinforcing agents of those forces. On occasions when television disagrees with those other forces, or simply does not take a stand, the child seems to rely on the other forces. In such situations, at least two outcomes are theoretically possible. The media could weaken the influence of the other socializing agencies, but I have as yet seen no significant evidence in support of this possibility. Conversely, it is possible that the apparent dominance of values and codes learned elsewhere is strengthened by the child's testing them in the media situation. Whether this happens, I cannot yet say.

One thing, however, seems clear, and it is my last and perhaps most important statement. We need to know much more about the interaction between the child and the television screen. In 1961, Schramm and his co-authors said:

> In a sense the term "effect" is misleading because it suggests that television "does something" to children. The connotation is that television is the actor; the children are acted on . . . Children are sitting victims; television bites them. Nothing could be further from the fact. It is the children who are most active in this relationship.[6]

I echo their views. We must concentrate on the more active partner in the child-television relationship. We must seek out and examine our implicit hypotheses about children. And we must use data and ideas generated in several fields to help us move toward an improved understanding of the relationship between children and media.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Eleanor E. Maccoby, "Effects of the Mass Media," Martin L. Hoffman and Lois Wladis Hoffman, editors, Review of Child Development Research, Volume I (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1964).

[2]While children noted and criticized "the robbing and killing and all," they often did so with an "of course that's wrong" or "that's obvious" approach; however, they seemed peculiarly sensitive to acts which made people unhappy and to violations of obligations--acts which they seemed to notice more often than did adults. (Perhaps this is because the child has personally seen or experienced violations of trust and role obligations, and has often encountered teasing, insults, and other attacks on a person's feelings.) In any case, under this category we find a host of examples; an older child leaving a younger child alone even though the purpose of leaving is to get help; a friend who tells another friend's secret; a husband who neither notices nor appreciates his wife's efforts; an incognito Martian who agrees to go on a Mars shot as the sole astronaut but who secretely plans to abandon ship on Mars.

[3]Kohlberg, for example, notes that most ten-year-olds in a study he cites interpreted the Golden Rule in terms of concrete reciprocity; if a boy hits you, hit him back. "By age eleven to thirteen most children can clearly judge in terms of ideal reciprocity, in terms of putting oneself in the place of someone in a different position, and in terms of sentiments of gratitude for past affection and favors." Lawrence Kohlberg, "Development of Moral Character and Moral Ideology," in Hoffman and Hoffman, op.cit., p. 398.

[4]Ibid., pp. 400-402.

[5]Ibid., p. 400.

[6]Wilbur Schramm, Jack Lyle, and Edwin B. Parker, Television in the Lives of Our Children (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1961), p. 1.

This paper was presented in 1969 at the annual conference of the American Association for Public Opinion Research and was, I believe, the first in this country to relate the processes of child development to children's reaction to television. In this last decade, a number of communications researchers have studied children's cognitive capacities and a number of studies of children and television commercials have incorporated cognitive style into their research designs. However, the mainstream of the field remains basically unchanged in these regards.

the many faces of tv (continued)

Grant Noble, author of Children in Front of the Small Screen,[8] bases his entire thesis on the belief that children get a fundamental satisfaction from "meeting" people on realistic television programs and reacting to them--a process he calls "para-social interaction." No loss of identity is involved. They respond, actively, as themselves. (It's quite a different process from the losing of identity in somebody's role in a film.) The interaction is seen as a distinguishing characteristic of television and an important one in the age of the nuclear family when children have limited access to a range of people to "bounce off." Without that range their opportunities for self-discovery are limited. (I am because I interact.) Thus television people become extended family for many children; and it is in this way that the medium actively serves an important social function.

Noble's idea that people on television are real enough to know and that one comes to know them by a process of interaction obviously relates to McLuhan's point that television is an oral culture medium, one which provides an experience of direct contact with people, and of coming to know them. In Understanding Media[9] he mentions what happened to Joanne Woodward. In her early days as a film star, people would stop her in the street and say, "Oh, Miss Woodward, how glad I am to meet you; I admired you when you were playing 'Eve' (or whatever)." Then Miss Woodward had a nervous breakdown and came back, years later, as a television star. She found that the way people received her then was entirely different. They would stop her in the street and say, "Um...I know we've met somewhere, but where?"

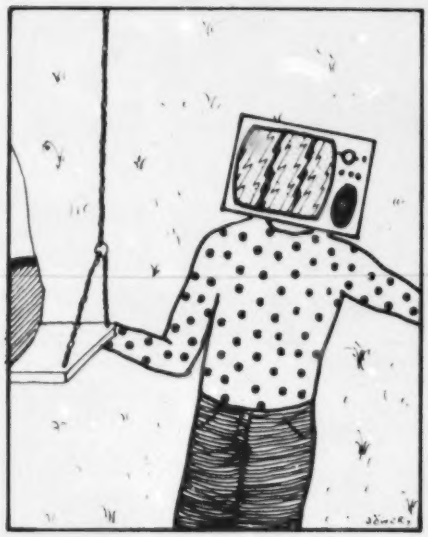
Almost any actor who appears regularly in a television series will bear out the general truth of that story. People often assume them to be the characters they play, and do not see them as actors who are playing roles. Raymond Burr gets letters asking for legal advice; Warren Mitchell [who plays a British "Archie Bunker"] gets soundly berated for being such a bigot! Many people send in baby clothes when a favorite character in a series has a baby, and wreaths when there is a funeral. And there are those homemakers who talk back to their television peers. (Forty percent of British homemakers talk back to television presenters, according to Grant Noble.)

There are, obviously, two possible reactions to such stories. One can, as Marie Winn does, bemoan the fact that television is a great distorter of perceptions of reality. Or one can, as Grant Noble does, see that there is an immense power that we may be able to channel to good use. It can offer more than actors to simply observe and identify with or imitate; it can offer an experience of a higher order, real people with whom we can interact. Considering the promising benefits to the developing child, I find it astonishing that, outside England, its possibilities have been largely neglected by producers and virtually ignored by researchers. I know of but two other studies that look at the suggested phenomenon of interaction at all--one by Horton and Wahl[10] and one by Rosengren and Windahl[11]--and they do not pursue its implications for young children specifically. Nor does McLuhan. It is in respect to the impact of television on young children that Noble makes his most telling contribution.

The Perceptions of Young Children -- and Interaction

Beyond the general credibility of the televised experience (which McLuhan sought to explain), lies the question of how real it is to the most vulnerable members of the television audience, young children. That must have a bearing on the way it influences them. How do they perceive what they see on television? What do they understand by it?

On the basis of his research, Noble offers these answers: young [pre-school] children perceive what they see on television in very literal and concrete terms, very much in accordance with Piaget's description of the perceptions of the pre-operational child; and they don't understand nearly as much as producers think they do. In a word, young children are the least understood audience of all.



Producers confidently use televison techniques in considerable ignorance of what young children understand by them. Do young children understand that an ant seen in close-up is really a small creature? Many think it is huge and are glad there aren't any in their backyard. Do they understand when a face is suddenly seen from a different angle? Many think it is a different person because the background has changed. What of the visual sequence: sun shining, snow melting, flowers blooming (the cliché to end all cliches)? Only 8 percent of young children understood this to mean spring. Do young children accept puppets and cartoons as real? Very often; and to Noble's testimony we can add that of the Superman imitators and the Melbourne girl and the panther. What of role-play? Noble suggests that children's understanding of it is very hazy. Margaret Mead was convinced that young children needed all the help they could get to make sense of role-play and that any dramatized programs for young children should start with a sequence showing the actors making up and dressing for their roles. My experience is that even that is not always sufficient. The perception of each instant seems to be a thing unto itself--one of Piaget's points, of course, in relation to pre-operational thought.

Aimee Dorr, who sees the area of children's understanding of television as the next research horizon, raises the question of whether children understand the tricks we play with time on television. The Bionic Man, for example, moves in slow motion when he's doing his bionic best. We understand this to mean he's moving like greased lightning. But the young child? You could ask.

As for flash-backs, or Walter Mitty dream sequences, it is a fair prediction that young children do not perceive them as they are intended by the producer.

And what of the people on television?

Adult: "What happens to the people when you turn off the television?"

Child: "The people lie down."

or

"They go back into the wall through the cable."

"Play School" actor/presenters are regularly asked: "How did you get out of the television set?"

So what is one to do about young children and television? Fly for cover, like Marie Winn and suggest that no young child should be allowed near it because it is not only a passive experience, but a dangerous distorter of reality? Or do we accept the fact that television is here to stay and look to capitalize on its strengths? What Noble suggests is that, although it is indeed difficult, particularly with young viewers, to provide programs which are truthful and active, a great deal can be done. If we take our cue from how children perceive the techniques we use, we can eliminate a great deal of misunderstanding. If we are true in space and time, we stand a chance of providing a meaningful and realistic experience. If actors are going to be perceived as real people, let them be as real, direct, and honest as possible.

Television, in a word, need not be passive, and it can tell more of the truth of an experience than is possible in other media. This message (rather freely adapted, I confess, but nevertheless implicit in Noble's thesis) is, in McLuhan's terms, very much the message of an oral culture. It would not be, I venture to say, in vogue in France or America.

FOOTNOTES

1 Ralph Garry and Michael Schmidbauer, "The Prix Jeunesse International 1964-76," paper presented at the Prix Jeunesse, Munich, June 1978.

2 "When I Was A Child, I Thought As a Child" Television and Social Behavior: Beyond Violence and Children, ed. Stephen B. Whithey and Ronald P. Abeles (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc., 1980)

3 "Modelling the Medium: Effects of Formal Properties on Children's Television Programs," paper presented at Symposium on Cognitive Processing of Television, Society for Research in Child Development, New Orleans, March 1977.

4 "Shape, Not Only Content: How Media's Symbols Partake in the Development of Abilities," The Sage Annual Review of Communications Research, vol. 8: The Development of Children's Communicative Behavior, Ellen Wartella, ed. (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications Inc., 1978).

5 (New York: The Viking Press, 1977).

6 Structuralism (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1970).

7 Children and Television: Lessons from "Sesame Street" (New York: Random House, 1974).

8 (London: Constable, 1975).

9 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964)

10 Donald Horton and Richard R. Wohl, "Mass Communication and Parasocial Interaction," Psychiatry XIX (1956).

11 Karl Erik Rosengren and Sven Windahl, Sociology of Mass Communication (New York: Penguin Books, 1972).

[Ed Note: This article is adapted from a talk given by Mr. Kendall to the National Conference of the Australian Pre-School Association in May 1979. Part II will appear in the next issue of Young Viewers.]

baby, you've come a long way

the screen image of youth

by ruth m. goldstein and edith zornow

"Why," asked a friend who is thirteen, "are old people like you interested in movies about people like me?"

Because we've been movie watchers and child watchers for years and it's fun to combine the sports. Because children and adolescents outnumber private eyes in the population but unlike them have not yet found a place in the film genre books. Because the image of youth on the screen has been even more tarnished than the image of women, blacks, American Indians, or Chicanos. Because we believe that "grown-up movies about children" (in Vincent Canby's phrase) have something to say to parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts, to students and teachers of psychology, education, film; to librarians, youth leaders, guidance counselors, to everyone interested in cultural mores.

As Freud pointed out, storytellers are far ahead of academicians in the search for psychological insight: they draw from sources not yet accessible to science. The living image on the screen may be a better clue to character than the textbook. WARRENDALE is worth a dozen monographs on the disturbed child. Miss Madrigal, the governess in THE CHALK GARDEN, can show us better than many analysts how to reach an unhappy adolescent.

Looking at movies about children, we learn about ourselves. Do we accept Tammy or Gidget or the child in PAPER MOON as true portraits or do we recognize them as Hollywood caricatures? Do we understand how a young girl like Anne Frank is stretching her mind and heart? In NOBODY WAVED GOODBYE, do we identify with the mother unable to communicate with her son? In THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE, do we see ourselves as our pupils see us?

Observing children and those close to children in such films is like observing "microbehavior," the small clues to character. When Olaf in HERE'S YOUR LIFE shakes hands with the blacksmith's daughter after seducing her, we are reading a particular boy, not just a footnote to pubescent sex; when Antoine Doinel in THE 400 BLOWS listens to his parents quarrel, we know from his face how completely he has retreated into independence--just as we know from his joy when they all go out to the movies how deeply he wants family closeness.

"The books we love are about growing up more than about being grown," wrote Wright Morris in About Fiction. So are many of the movies we love, from ZERO FOR CONDUCT to SMALL CHANGE.

We search them for answers to how we and the children have become what we are, how we and the children can become more than we are.

A Resource

Initiation into love and sex and death is as trite as spring, but the poet can make spring happen again for the first time. So can the filmmaker who is an artist. S/he knows that children don't really repeat themselves; they are never exactly alike, despite their broad and deep similarities. They are people who come one by one. For each of these, out of his/her memory and imagination and love, the Jean Vigo or François Truffaut or Satyajit Ray or Federico Fellini makes plain what Katherine Anne Porter has called the "thumb-print" of character.

Our book, The Screen Image of Youth: Movies about Children and Adolescents (Metuchen NJ: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1980), does not presume to be a text on child psychology. It is not a sociological study of the image of childhood in cinema. Nor is it a history of Hollywood's child stars. Although it casts light incidentally on the way children and adolescents have been presented on the screen over a span of years, as society and acting fashions have changed, it is primarily a reference book.

We hope that we are offering a useful and even entertaining guide to movies that can be viewed and discussed profitably by anyone interested in how the young behave and how the generations may understand each other--movies that can also be seen as signposts on the cultural landscape, marking our developing attitudes toward children and adolescents.

The book includes more than 350 films in which a child or an adolescent is a significant character. For our purpose, "adolescent" means under twenty years of age, to exclude delayed adolescence like Dustin Hoffman's in THE GRADUATE or Marlon Brando's and the motorcycle gang's in THE WILD ONES. The list includes feature-length entertainment films, made-for-television films, and selected documentaries of a non-clinical nature.

Starting with the first important film about a child, THE KID (1921), this volume includes films about children and adolescents from that date to the present. Space and financial considerations have required us to be selective, as did the accessibility of the films for users of this reference source. A few film classics (ROAD TO LIFE), seminal films (DEAD END), and films from book classics (DAVID COPPERFIELD) have been included from the thirties and forties; in general, we have concentrated on movies released here and abroad in the last twenty-five years. Most of the films described here are now available non-theatrically in 16mm.

Obviously our choices will not be everyone's The field is vast. Our selections are very personal. From the television dramas about adolescence, the Disneys, the formula commercial films, we have culled to our own taste. We hope we have not omitted representative films. Above all, we have been concerned not with films for children but with films that have something to tell us about children.

Some Brief Sketches

Long before THE KID, filmmakers had been attracted to the charms of infancy. In Louis Lumière's LE DEJEUNER DE BEBE (1898), Maman et Papa spoon-fed Bébé in a high chair and the audience ate it up. With such natural monkeys around, who needed actors? As Edmund Wilson said, Baby Peggy's public didn't want to see her act any more than they wanted to see Rin Tin Tin act.

Before the twenties, plots were straight out of nineteenth century melodrama. In Edwin S. Porter's THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY (1903), a five-year-old tries to untie the unconscious railway signalman and finally brings him around by splashing water in his face. As The Moving Picture World reported, in Griffith's first one-reeler for Biograph, THE ADVENTURES OF DOLLIE (1908), there is "the thwarting by a kind Providence of the attempt to kidnap for revenge a pretty little girl by a gypsy." Not to worry. After shooting the rapids in a water barrel, Dollie is rescued by small boys fishing near the falls. "The amazed and happy parents fold in their arms their loved one, who is not much worse off for her marvelous experience."

The trauma-proof young adventurer is a movie tradition, all the way to TRUE GRIT (1969). Nobody watching the Our Gang comedies thought it hurt Spanky when Baby Jane tied him to a shower curtain and put a cactus bush under his bottom. Alas, nobody thought it hurt Farina, either, when the white kids mistreated him--nobody but other black youngsters.

The omnipotent tot is part of screen mythology. Down through the decades in Hollywood, a little child has saved the unhappy millionaires, the gamblers with hearts of gold, the couples drifting apart, the lonely curmudgeons--saved them by falling sick, getting hurt, running away, or just giving the grown-ups a good talking to. The archetype is DIMPLES (1936), in which Shirley Temple redeems her straying grandfather, Frank Morgan, while Stepin Fetchit stands by.

In 1936, Graham Greene's review of Shirley Temple's CAPTAIN JANUARY said that Shirley's popularity seemed to rest "on a coquetry quite as mature as Miss Colbert's and on an oddly precocious body as voluptuous in grey flannel trousers as Miss Dietrich's." Later, his review of her WEE WILLIE WINKIE, which also referred to Shirley's disconcertingly sexual image, was the subject of a celebrated libel suit brought by Shirley Temple and Twentieth Century-Fox against Greene and his magazine, Night and Day. Shirley won the suit.

Turned down by Our Gang, Shirley Temple was to hobnob with the great of the thirties. FDR thanked her for lighting the Depression with her smile; Thomas Mann and H. G. Wells visited her in her dressing room. Only a dyed-in-the-wool cynic could fail to be affected by her LITTLE MISS MARKER, said Mordaunt Hall in The New York Times.

Noncynical millions succumbed, in every sense of the word, to her BRIGHT EYES (1934) and CURLY TOP (1935) and DIMPLES (1936). Her collaborators included Bill "Bojangles" Robinson (THE LITTLE COLONEL, 1934), and John Ford and Kipling (WEE WILLIE WINKIE, 1937). When she gave Abraham Lincoln advice (THE LITTLEST REBEL, 1935), few remembered that she was speaking to an actor. All over the world, mothers sighed as she danced and sang ("Baby, Take a Bow," "Animal Crackers in My Soup," "The Good Ship Lollipop"); then they went home to put little Janey's hair in curlers and sign her up for a course in tap.

Except for book movies like HEIDI (1937), Shirley's "original" plots were sentimental variations on a theme: the moppet vs. the monster, or cuteness conquers all. In BABY, TAKE A BOW (1934), she rescued ex-convict Papa from an insurance detective; in CURLY TOP, she transformed a snobbish orphanage trustee by singing "When I Grow Up"; and in LITTLE MISS MARKER, she brought bookie Adolphe Menjou to his knees in prayer.

"The Sunshine Girl," they called her. "A perfect doll," she was irresistible.

In the films that we have included in our book, there are many that tell twice-told tales about children and adolescents. They have been made to conform, in small ways or large, to the stereotypes. Their authors or directors or producers have not learned (as F. Scott Fitzgerald said in "The Rich Boy") that in life, "There are no types, no plurals."

But there are other films made not by manufacturers of products, but by artists. Over the years, some of the greatest directors and writers of cinema have given us sensitive, truthful, sometimes overwhelming pictures of childhood and adolescence.

In our book you will meet, each in his own right, the small brother and sister with their old, old grandmother in India (Satyajit Ray's PATHER PANCHALI); the boy staring out at us from behind the bars of the police wagon in Paris (François Truffaut's THE 400 BLOWS); the poor Roman billposter's son sharing his father's pain (Vittorio De Sica's THE BICYCLE THIEF); the ambassador's child meddling in adult concerns he does not understand (Carol Reed's THE FALLEN IDOL); the kid salvaging pop bottles on the Coney Island beach (Morris Engel's THE LITTLE FUGITIVE); the rancher's son crying after his departing hero (George Stevens' SHANE); the boys rebelling against their masters in the French boarding school (Jean Vigo's ZERO FOR CONDUCT); the children burying the dead animals in wartime (Rene Clement's FORBIDDEN GAMES); and the adolescent planning to go with her brother and his bride on their honeymoon (Fred Zinnemann's THE MEMBER OF THE WEDDING). You will also meet the "quiet one" in Harlem; the adolescents of "the cool world," of two worlds, of the world of ballet; the children who are emotionally disturbed, blind, mute, disoriented by war or poverty or racism; the children adrift; the children who draw; the young who are mystics, lovers, bullies, corrupters; the young who are pregnant, defenseless, vulnerable, lost, searching; and the children from the oldest books and the newest headlines.

With their parents and nannies, idols and foes, pet kestrels and tamed wild stallions, they have come a long way from Baby Burlesks and HENRY ALDRICH HAUNTS A HOUSE. Not that it's a matter of the passing of the years; Chaplin's THE KID and Truffaut's THE 400 BLOWS could be contemporaneous. As Thornton Wilder said, every masterpiece was written this morning.